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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal, process-oriented study was conducted to compare the content and effects of day care attendance with care in the home. Collection of baseline data involved 120 children of 12 through 18 months of age. Sixty of these children spent their weekdays in 1 of 12 day care centers, while the other 60 were cared for in homes by their mothers or family day care mothers. The main purpose of the first part of the study was to describe and compare the daily activities of children in centers and at home, reporting their interaction with adults, their emotional attachment to the mothers, and their general development. Methods used were direct observation of activities and interaction with adults in the children's natural surroundings, a mother-attachment test, and a development test. The first follow-up investigation, which took place when the children were 5.5 years old, involved 102 of the 120 families and focused on family changes, descriptions and comparisons of the children's social interaction with adults and playmates, and measurements of the children's general development. Fifty-two children and their families participated in the second follow-up assessment, which was conducted first, when children were in first grade and again, when they were in third grade. Children studied in the second follow-up had either attended day care centers during their entire preschool career or had been cared for in their homes during all of this period. Results are discussed. (RH)

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BACKGROUND

Public child supervision amenities have been heavily expanded in the past fifteen years, due partly to a labour shortage in the mid-1960s. By offering places in day care centers, society encouraged housewives to enter gainful employment. The expansion has also been accelerated by efforts to improve the equality of the sexes. The main argument here has been that day care centers are needed to give women the same rights and opportunities as men where gainful employment is concerned. Roughly 110 000 children - just over one in six - are now attending day care centers.

Experiences during the pre-school years vary in the number of respects as between children attending day care centers and those spending every day in their homes. Educationalists, psychologists, parents and policy makers are of course very concerned to know the nature of these differences in experiences, together with their conceivable short-term and long-term effects on children's development.

In Scandinavian pre-school research, few studies have been made comparing the content and effects of day care attendance with care in the home. The overwhelming bulk of reported research is American and is above all concerned with the emotional, social and cognitive development of the very young. Hitherto, however, this research has been subject to several weaknesses: (1) Shortterm developmental effects have been studied instead of more longterm ones. (2) Studies have been made of developmental effects per se (as manifested by test results), while less attention has been paid to describing differences of educational experience which could account for differences in children's development. (3) Traditional laboratory methods, whereby children have been studied in unfamiliar environments for short periods, have been used instead of methods whereby children are studied in the environments one would like to investigate.

In the study which is briefly summarized here, we have tried to overcome these weaknesses. Thus the study is longitudinal (i.e. a number of children and families have been followed for a considerable period), and it is process-oriented (i.e. the children's activities and social interaction

have been studied so as to improve our understanding of the causes underlying differences in development). Finally, to make the study more "ecologically valid", observations and testings have been conducted in the children's everyday surroundings, i.e. day care centers and homes.

COLLECTION OF BASE-LINE DATA (1970-1971)

The first round involved 120 children aged 12-18 months. Sixty of these children spent their weekdays in one of 12 day care centers in Göteborg, while the other 60 were cared for in the home by their mothers or family day care mothers. All the children being cared for at home were on the waiting list for one of the 12 day care centers. The two groups were comparable as regards age, the numbers of girls and boys, the numbers of children with siblings, parental occupations and family residential area.

The main purpose of the first part of the study was to describe and compare the daily activities of children in day care centers and children at home, their interaction with adults, their emotional attachment to the mother and their general development. The methods used were direct observations of activities and interaction with adults in the children's natural surroundings, a mother attachment test and a development test (Griffiths).

The results of this part of the study showed that, during the earliest years of life (the children were 12-18 months old), center children and home children had similar experiences and did roughly the same things. Most of their time was spent learning to walk, run or climb, and on everyday care, i.e. dressing and undressing, changing nappies and feeding.

There were, however, certain differences between the two environments. The adults whom the children met during the day, and who were exclusively women both at home and in the centers, differed in terms of functional roles. In the centers the adult had one major function, namely that of looking after the children, while mothers and family day care mothers cleaned, did laundry and went shopping in addition to looking after the children.

Interaction (conversation, play, body contact etc.) between adults and children occurred more frequently and for longer periods in the home environments than in the day care centers. The home children had contact with their caregivers approximately twice as often as the center children. Mostly there were three types of activities involved: cognitive-verbal situations (with the adult telling stories and giving the names of different things), play and exploration of one's surroundings.

Adults in the homes were more often found to influence the children's activities by means of prohibitive and distractive techniques ("Don't do that", "Mind that"). These prohibitions or distractions were mostly used when the child was exploring things which were not intended for children. Things of this kind were not present in the day care centers, so that prohibitive situations of this kind seldom arose there.

Developmentally speaking, no differences were found between the test results of the two groups. Nor were there any differences in terms of emotional mother-child contact between children staying at home with their mothers all day and children attending day care centers or children being looked after by a family day care mother (references 1-6).

THE FIRST FOLLOW-UP (1974-76)

The first follow-up, which took place when the children were 5½ years old, involved 102 of the 120 families. Its main purpose can be expressed under three headings, viz: (1) studies of family changes, (2) descriptions and comparisons of the children's social interaction with adults and playmates and (3) measurements of the children's general development.

The methods used for collecting data were interviews with parents, direct observations of adults and peers in the children's natural environments and a development test (Griffiths).

Very briefly, the results of this initial follow-up were as follows.

(1) The participating families, which, as groups, have been fully comparable with regard to a large number of background variables during the collection of base-line data, now proved, four years later, to differ systematically in several respects. Some of these differences were due to the shortage of day care centers, while others were due to differences in the opportunities of families to influence their own total situation.

(2) Neither environment, home or day care center, proved better or worse than the other as regards influencing the children's general development.

(3) There were great differences between girls and boys, as regards both social interactions with adults and peers, daily activities and developmental results. These differences were far more pronounced than differences related to child care environment.

A full presentation and discussion of the results will be found in references 7-10. These include, for example, a discussion of the effect in terms of sex roles, especially where small boys are concerned, of so few men taking part in the day-to-day life of pre-school children. The effects of differences in the expectations entertained by adults concerning girls and boys respectively are also discussed in relation to those sex-linked differences in patterns of activities and skills as revealed by the results.

THE SECOND FOLLOW-UP (1977-80)

52 children and their families participated in the second follow-up. These children had either attended day care centers for the whole of their pre-school career (26 children) or else been cared for in their homes for the whole of this period (26 children). In other words, the two groups provided the greatest possible contrast in terms of child care experiences between the ages of 1 and 7 years. Unfortunately the financial resources of the project were insufficient for children experiencing several different child supervision

environments during the corresponding period (e.g. two years with a family day care mother followed by one year at home with the mother and three years in a day care center, etc.) also to be included.

The main purpose of this follow-up was to find out how children in the two groups ("center children" and "home children") had coped with the transition to the school and how their development, especially their social development, had continued in a new, common environment. The major research questions included: (1) adjustment and transition to school, (2) social development, (3) internalization of social norms and values, (4) self-evaluation and (5) sex-role attitudes.

Data were collected on two occasions, mainly by interviewing parents, children and teachers. At the first data collection phase (spring terms 1977 and 1978), when the children were in the second term of grade 1, their parents and teachers were interviewed about such things as starting school, school adjustment and parent-teacher co-operation.

The second collection of data took place in the spring terms of 1979 and 1980, by which time the children were in grade 3. Parents, children and teachers were interviewed and a sociometric test was administered in each class. The interviews focused on social development, self-esteem, attitudes concerning sex roles, children's social contacts, internalization of social norms and values etc.

As regards transition and adjustment to school, the results of the interviews with teachers and parents showed that the great majority of children, both in the center group and in the home group had coped very well with starting school and had adjusted well to this new environment. There were certain differences, however, in the teachers' experiences of center children and home children and of girls and boys respectively. According to the teachers, the "home girls" and the "center boys" got on best at school, but for different reasons: girls who had spent their pre-school years at home were considered particularly positive because they were "quieter, more disciplined and better concentrated" than girls who had attended day care centers or boys regardless of pre-school environment. Center boys, on the other hand, were more confident in the social context, and showed "frankness, ability to co-operate

and powers of initiative". One is tempted to regard the teachers' assessment of the children as very much influenced by their own different expectations concerning boys and girls respectively; girls should be "pleasant and concentrated", while boys are expected to be "active and full of initiative".

The data collected when the children were in grade 3 are still being analysed, but preliminary findings are available concerning the children's social development, self-esteem and sex-role attitudes. Once again, the most striking differences occur between girls and boys rather than between centre or home children. As regards social competence and self-esteem, the differences are not so much related to high or low test scores and positive or negative appraisals by teachers and parents. Both groups are socially well integrated and have a positive view of themselves. Instead social competence, for example, is manifested differently depending on differences in the social relation patterns of girls and boys. Both girls and boys usually have friends of the same sex, girls tend more to play in small groups and boys in larger ones and, consequently, girls tend more often to form close, paired "best friends" relationships, whereas boys are more likely to have three or more "mates". These differences in social relations require different social skills; girls need to be more capable of forming and preserving close and emotionally deeper relations, while boys are more in need of the social competencies of leading, following and co-operating. The children's self-esteem, be it high or low, is also derived from different aspects of their lives (physical performance, social relations, school achievement), with girls and boys devoting different degrees of importance to being good at sport, being popular with other children and doing well at school.

As regards attitudes to sex-roles, the children were interviewed for information concerning traditional and non-traditional attitudes towards activities and vocational choice. In the first interview, the children were asked which people could do different adult activities ("mothers", "fathers" or "both") and different child activities ("boys", "girls" or "both"). In the second interview the children were asked what they wanted to do when they grew up.

In summary, the answers showed that in both interviews the center children replied less traditionally than the home children, and the girls as a group expressed attitudes concerning sex-roles which were less stereotyped than those of the boys. Thus the center girls were found to give the least traditional answers.

Discussions of the findings, and more in-depth analyses of the data collected, will be successively presented in the form of interim reports. References 12 and 13 are examples of two such interim reports which are available to interested readers, and further interim reports will be appearing during the spring of 1983.

PROJECT REPORTS, ARTICLES etc.

Collection of basic data

1. Horneman G. & Håkansson B.: Attachment: an exploratory study aimed at elucidating the effect of alternative environments on the emotional attachment between child and mother. Department of Psychology, University of Göteborg, 1971. (In Swedish)

2. Cochran, M.M. et al.: A comparison of nursery and non-nursery child rearing patterns in Sweden. Summary of results for families and day nurseries taking part. The SCP Project, June 1972 (stencil). (In Swedish)

3. Cochran, M.M.: A Comparison of Nursery and Non-Nursery Child-rearing Patterns in Sweden. Unpubl. doctoral dissertation. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1973.

4. Gunnarsson, L.: Family Day Care Homes: An alternative form of child care. Unpubl. Masters thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1973.

5. Cochran, M.M.: A Comparison of Group Day Care and Family Child rearing Patterns in Sweden. Child Development, 1977, 48, 702-707.

6. Cochran, M.M. & Robinson, J.: Day Care, Family Circumstances and Sex Differences in Children. In Advance in Day Care and Early Education, Volume III, in press.

The first follow-up

7. Gunnarsson, L.:The Swedish Childrearing Study: A longitudinal study of children in different childrearing environments - First follow-up. Paper presented at the Conference on Research Perspectives in the Ecology of Human Development, Cornell University, 1977. (mimeo)

8. Gunnarsson, L. & Cochran, M.M.: Daghemmet och Hemmet: En jämförande studie av barn i olika uppväxtmiljöer - första uppföljningen. Resultatsummering till deltagande familjer och daghem. (The Day Care Center and the home: A comparative study of children in different child care environments - the first follow-up. Summary of results for families and day care centers taking part.) Dep. of Educational Research, University of Göteborg. 1977 (mimeo) (In Swedish).

9. Gunnarsson, L.: Children in Day Care and Family Care in Sweden: A Follow-up. Report from University of Göteborg, Dep. of Educational Research, No. 21. September 1978.

10. Cochran, M.M. & Gunnarsson, L.: Samma könsskillnader på dagis och hemma. (Same sex differences in day care centers and homes). Forskning och Framsteg, September 1980. (In Swedish).

The second follow-up

11. Hägglund,S.: En Frågeställning och en Forskningsmodell - Utvecklingsteoretisk och forskningsmetodisk bakgrund till ett planerat projekt om manliga förskollärares effekter på könsrollsutveckling hos daghemsbarn. (A Research Question and a Research Model - A theoretical and methodological framework for the study of influences of male pre-school teachers on the sex-role development of children in day care centers.) Report from the Dep. of Educational Research, University of Göteborg, No. 61, February 1980. SCP 18. (In Swedish)

12. Rydén,L. & Hill, A.: Skolstart: Redovisning av intervjuer med lärare och föräldrar kring skolanpassning, kamratrelationer, m m. (Starting school: Description of interviews with teachers and parents concerning school adjustment, class mate relations etc.) SCP-17. January 1979. (mimeo) (In Swedish)

13. Larner, M.: Effects of Day Care on Social Development. Cornell University, January 1982. (mimeo)